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Again, the Scourge of Chemical Weapons

Credible
Deterrent
Needed

By Kenneth L. Adelman

WASHINGTON — THE Reagan Administration has requested \$163 million to produce chemical weapons. At the same time, the Administration is negotiating with the Soviet Union and others in Geneva to produce a treaty that will ban chemical weapons from the face of the earth. A contradiction? No. A credible deterrent is needed until an agreement can be achieved. We believe that restoring our deterrent will in fact facilitate an agreement.

During World War I, chemical weapons wrought approximately a million casualties, including 90,000 deaths. A British officer vividly described the horror of a chemical weapons attack: "Try to imagine the ... troops as they saw the vast cloud of greenish-yellow gas spring out of the ground and slowly move downwind toward them, the vapor clinging to the earth, seeking out every hole and hollow. ... First wonder, then fear; then, as the first fringes of the cloud enveloped them and left them choking and agonized in the fight for breath — panic."

During the 1930's, Mussolini's forces used chemical weapons in Ethiopia. For 30 years afterward, however, no nation used them on the battlefield.

Chemical weapons were again used in the mid-1960's in the Yemeni civil war. Over the past decade, Soviet surrogates, Laotian and Vietnamese forces, have used lethal chemical and toxin weapons in Southeast Asia. More recently, Soviet forces themselves have, we believe, used chemical weapons in Afghanistan, and United Nations investigations confirm that Iraq has used chemical weapons in its dismal war against Iran. All of these countries are in violation of the Geneva Protocol of 1925 banning the use of chemical weapons.

Equally frightening, interest in possessing these deadly weapons is spreading, particularly in the Middle East and Asia. This trend threatens to make nerve gas and mustard gas

grisly common means of warfare. In 1973, only five countries possessed chemical weapons; today at least three times that many do. Stopping the spread of chemical weapons is a particularly vexing problem because their production frequently involves chemicals produced for legitimate commercial purposes. Moreover, the production of chemical weapons is relatively simple. Almost any country could probably do it.

The United States seeks to prevent the spread of chemical weapons and has been gearing up to act on this goal. The best solution would, of course, be to ban them completely. That is what we are trying to do, first and foremost. Our goal is a comprehensive treaty banning the production, stockpiling, transfer and use of chemical weapons and requiring the destruction of all existing chemical weapons anywhere in the world.

Unfortunately, the negotiations in Geneva are moving very slowly. The Russians' overwhelming advantage in chemical warfare means that they have scant incentive to negotiate. Thus, while we continue trying to negotiate a treaty, we need to take interim steps to address the situation we face today.

First, we must bring the problem to international attention, as we have done by reporting on the alleged use of chemical weapons in Southeast Asia, Afghanistan and Iraq and by supporting impartial investigations into such allegations.

Second, the Government and the chemical industry must work together to keep chemicals from being diverted to weapons production. Fortunately, the American chemical industry has already acted very respon-

sibly. In one recent case, some American manufacturers were approached by a seemingly reputable firm that was planning to supply chemicals for Iraq's weapons program. Close cooperation between Government and industry prevented the transfer.

Third, we and our allies need to strengthen and enforce export controls on chemicals that are critical for weapons production. The United States has already placed strict controls on the export of key chemicals to Iran and Iraq. The nations of the European Community, as well as Canada, Japan, Australia and New Zealand, have joined us in this effort.

Fourth, we and other concerned nations must expand and improve intelligence capabilities. We must be able to identify efforts by countries to acquire a chemical weapons capability and must monitor international traffic in key chemical components.

Finally, until we have an effective treaty eliminating chemical weapons, we must maintain a credible chemical capability. This will both deter Soviet use of such weapons and provide an incentive for Moscow to negotiate. Although the United States has not produced chemical weapons since 1969, Soviet production has continued. A modernization of the American deterrent is long overdue, as Congress recognized this past session when giving the go-ahead for production of binary chemical weapons.

Our two efforts to curb the spread of chemical weapons — at the negotiating table in Geneva and by rebuilding the American deterrent — are complementary. Together, they just may prevent a lot of suffering from these ghastly weapons in coming years. □

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